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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 1 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued) (E/1996/4 and Corr.1, E/1996/18 and Add.1)

(a) COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (continued) (E/1996/61)

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia) said that his delegation attached priority to the eradication of poverty and believed that the organizations of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and the regional development banks should strengthen their interaction, cooperation and coordination to that end. The Council should pave the way at its current session for such enhanced coordination. Inter-institutional collaboration at the field level and in operational activities should be the starting-point for broader cooperation, for example, on policies and their social implications, on which discussions already were under way.

The discussion of resources in the report of the Secretary-General under consideration (A/1996/61) was short on recommendations for increasing the availability of resources. The voluntary character of the country strategy note (CSN) should be emphasized. The note should not be a prerequisite for system support to programmes and strategies for poverty eradication, nor should it be used as a pretext for preferential treatment for resource allocation. Further clarification was needed to determine the content and orientation of policy framework papers (PFPs) and the desirability of establishing greater complementarity between them and the country strategy notes.

The United Nations system should offer recommendations, rather than guidelines, on definitions, indicators and instruments for evaluating the impact of poverty eradication programmes. The scope of the proposed monitoring required clarification. It was for the General Assembly to adopt policy guidelines for a harmonized approach to poverty eradication on the part of the international community; the Council should implement the coordinating tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly. Similarly, the General Assembly, not

the Council, should be the primary forum for discussion of cross-cutting issues relating to poverty eradication, such as the work of the United Nations system relating to the enabling environment and the integration of the economic and social dimensions. In the context of the functional commissions, the Commission for Social Development should be assigned the leading role in poverty eradication.

Mr. AKBAR (Pakistan) said that the activities of the United Nations system for poverty eradication should be guided primarily by the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Given the dimensions and complexity of the problem of poverty, integrated international action was needed to ensure a better future for the 1.3 billion poor of the world, whose conditions were continuing to deteriorate.

His delegation appreciated the contribution of the United Nations system, within its constraints and limitations, to efforts to eradicate poverty. Matters relating to the creation of an enabling environment, the responsibility of the United Nations for enhancement of the information base on poverty and the inadequacy of available resources were interrelated and thus should be viewed as a whole. Given how crucial the availability of resources was to efforts to eradicate poverty, the subject should have been dealt with more fully and in a manner which reflected the interrelated nature of the different mandates involved. Future reports should bring together all available data on the enabling environment, the availability of resources and relevant studies carried out within the United Nations system.

Although his delegation noted with satisfaction that foreign direct investment flows to the developing countries were increasing, it believed that they were by no means a substitute for resource allocation for the developing countries, in particular, for poverty eradication. His delegation fully agreed with the Secretary-General that predictable and adequate financial resources were essential if poverty eradication was to be considered a realistic goal in the foreseeable future. Recommendation 14 in section I of the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/61) required further consideration. The United Nations system should continue to work directly with Member States on the formulation of country strategy notes and policy framework papers. With regard to the recommendations in section II, particular attention should be given to

mainstreaming the gender perspective in United Nations activities for poverty eradication. With regard to section III, the Council might wish to consider the enabling environment at its next session. The areas of responsibility suggested for consideration by the functional commissions were appropriate.

His country was focusing its poverty eradication efforts by allocating more resources for human development, health, education and the well-being of the population. It was pursuing a policy to promote economic growth and improve income distribution and gave priority to agricultural development, with an emphasis on food production, in order to ensure food security.

Mr. RASHEED (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the concern of UNICEF with poverty was motivated by three basic facts. First, because of their dependency, children often were the first victims of poverty. Secondly, because poverty was most prevalent among large families, children constituted the single largest group affected by poverty. Thirdly, in view of the nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, virtually all the world's children were entitled to the fundamental rights of health, education and nutrition.

UNICEF believed that universal access to basic social services was a precondition for eradicating poverty. It was important to distinguish between basic human needs and basic social services. UNICEF defined basic social services to include basic education, primary health care, including reproductive health and population programmes, nutrition and low-cost water and sanitation. Basic human needs were broader in scope and included employment, shelter and credit.

The UNICEF strategy to promote universal access to basic social services focused on direct support for service delivery, capacity-building and social mobilization and advocacy. Full participation of the poor, communities and local authorities was crucial for capacity-building and sustainability. Countries in which remarkable social progress had been achieved had demonstrated a sustained commitment to providing basic social services for children, a commitment bolstered by political will, effective strategies and efficient delivery systems. Investment in people - in particular, children - was good economics everywhere in the world, irrespective of the level of development. The time had come to translate the growing consensus on the importance of

investing in children into tangible measures to ensure adequate resource allocation and popular participation in poverty eradication.

UNICEF strongly favoured the implementation of the 20/20 initiative and noted that there was a consensus that its implementation, along with debt swaps, decentralization and community co-management, made it possible to sustain most goals in most countries, even in times of economic and fiscal austerity.

UNICEF agreed that there was no single best strategy for poverty eradication. Accordingly, the country programme for cooperation was the central document used by it to establish priorities and define strategies at the field level. It was an active partner in the formulation of the country strategy note and participated actively in various inter-agency forums to combat poverty. UNICEF strongly agreed with the Consultative Committee on Coordination and Operational Questions (CCCOQ) that joint assessments and analysis of poverty at the country level provided a solid foundation for better harmonization and integration. Its commitment to reducing the gender disparity in the achievement of global goals focused on the education of girls, the health of girls, adolescents and women and children's and women's rights.

In conclusion, he emphasized the importance of alleviating the plight of the poorest of the poor and said that a reallocation of a minute fraction of global output in favour of basic services, combined with greater efficiency and sustainability through the practice of community co-management, could finally bring about a world free of disease, ignorance and hunger.

Mr. WANG Xuexian (China) said that poverty eradication activities should be accorded priority in the follow-up to the relevant international conferences. The coordination of such activities between various organizations and at various levels should extend beyond the United Nations system to include the recipient countries, so as to ensure the fulfilment of the needs and priorities of those countries.

The lasting eradication of poverty required the elimination of its root causes through development cooperation, a favourable international economic environment, the alleviation of the debt burdens of developing countries, and the enhanced ability of those countries to improve their people's living standards. The trend to decreased official development assistance over the past twenty years threatened the goals of poverty eradication and endangered the world economy as a whole. If, however, the international community implemented

in earnest the follow-up to the recent international conferences, there was every reason to believe that poverty would be gradually eliminated.

Mr. KIWANUKA (Uganda) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Poverty was perhaps the most acute problem facing the world. It could not be overemphasized that people were at the centre of all development, and that the purpose of development was to offer people options, one of which was access to income. His delegation was gratified to note that poverty eradication had become a United Nations system-wide concern. In Africa, the continent most afflicted by poverty, the major initiatives which addressed African economic recovery, most recently the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, all emphasized that approach. It was also encouraging to note that World Bank lending, as described at the World Summit for Social Development, had targeted assistance to rural sector development, especially feeder roads. Over the past 10 years, his Government had emphasized poverty eradication policies, and its current strategy was to focus specifically on the increase of household income, basic education and the construction and maintenance of feeder roads.

In order to ensure sustainability, poverty eradication strategies required the full involvement of the poor in all stages, from formulation to implementation. At the same time, Governments must be key players. Poverty eradication strategies should be properly focused and multisectoral with a rational application of macroeconomic policies.

In the short and medium terms, the modernization and development of the agricultural sector should be a top priority because the majority of people were engaged in agricultural production. Peasant farmers should be educated in methods of soil conservation and the use of agricultural technologies to increase production. Environmentally sustainable development called for the integration of economic, social, technical and ecological dimensions. Soils must be conserved, and deforestation and land degradation controlled. However, unless people had access to affordable alternative sources of energy, deforestation was bound to continue. Policies that subsidized solar technology would go a long way towards preserving the forests.

In order to overcome the problem of food insecurity, there was a need for land reform, especially land access for women, improved farming systems, new

technologies, and better education. The development of rural infrastructure was fundamental to the eradication of rural poverty. The need for access to markets and to affordable credit, especially for disadvantaged groups like women, could not be overemphasized.

Women were the backbone of African societies. Their political and economic empowerment was therefore fundamental to the success of strategies for poverty eradication. Women must have access to resources, especially land, and must be protected by inheritance laws. Deliberate affirmative action was needed to reduce the huge imbalances that persisted. For the past 10 years, his Government had adopted affirmative action measures.

Sub-Saharan Africa still lacked a critical mass of strategic skills in practically every discipline. The situation was worse in science and technology, management and accountancy. The problem had been recognized by the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the World Bank, and other specialized agencies.

In the past, the vital link between democracy and development had often been ignored. The spread of competitive elections in Africa had expanded the frontiers of democracy as well as peace and stability, bringing a commitment to the improvement of the quality of governance, and to transparency and accountability in public administration. Continued assistance from the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions to promote and strengthen democracy, good governance and civil society was fundamental.

Successful coordination policies to eradicate poverty would depend on the commitment of host Governments. They must be key players and must have a feeling of ownership and control of poverty eradication programmes. It was therefore imperative that the initiatives of the United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions should converge with national initiatives and priorities and that there should be a constant dialogue to ensure consistency and the effective delivery of programmes.

Ms. TRONE (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that women's empowerment, reproductive health and rights, and the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups were essential elements in social development and poverty eradication. Women should be active participants or architects in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty eradication programmes. Reproductive health programmes for women and adolescents should be enhanced, and

the specific needs of people living on the margins of society should also be addressed.

All programmes supported by UNFPA were ultimately addressed to the poor and designed to foster the social and economic development which led to poverty eradication. In an environment of rising demands and competing interests, it was necessary to supplement the pool of development resources from non-traditional sources, including the private sector, to collaborate more closely with non-governmental organizations, and to encourage ownership of development programmes by local communities as well as by government agencies.

Mr. SOEPRAPTO (Indonesia) said that his delegation fully supported the statement of the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The coexistence of dire poverty with enormous affluence was evidence of the failure of recent poverty eradication programmes, including those of the United Nations system. Chronic poverty required a multisectoral and holistic approach, as well as the harmonization and coordination of United Nations poverty eradication activities. In that context, the United Nations should focus on delivering technical assistance that supported national poverty eradication efforts.

His delegation requested clarification of the recommendation that the United Nations system should develop indicators for monitoring poverty programmes (E/1996/61, para. 70), since individual countries knew their own needs best and merely required technical assistance in developing their own guidelines. With regard to section I, recommendation 14, he said that cooperation at the policy level was at least as important as cooperation at the field level; field-level programmes should be fully integrated into national programmes and should not impose new conditionalities on development assistance. Moreover, as the country strategy note (CSN) was the main instrument for coordinating United Nations operational activities for development, any comprehensive review of major United Nations programmes by the field-level committee referred to in recommendation II of section I should be subject to the guidance of national Governments.

Given the importance of programme harmonization and an integrated, intergovernmental approach, a comprehensive, thematic multi-year programme of poverty eradication should be developed and established by the Council and its subsidiary organs. Moreover, the issue of declining financial resources was a

far more urgent topic for the Council's high-level and coordination segments than was that of an enabling environment.

Mr. AVALLE (Argentina) said that his delegation fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In approaching the item under consideration, there was a need to distinguish between intergovernmental and inter-agency coordination. The work being carried out by agencies, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to eradicate poverty needed to be analysed at both field and headquarters levels. If the Council really wished to promote coordination, and not merely make statements about it, it needed to create an interface between the United Nations system and the intergovernmental system. The agencies, in turn, would not be able to achieve anything unless there was an interface with the intergovernmental system. ACC had a primordial role to play in promoting inter-agency coordination; however, it had no interface with the intergovernmental system. Coordination needed to be considered not just at the field level but also at the conceptual level of headquarters; only then would it be possible to talk of coordination of the activities of the system for poverty eradication.

In order to make the coordination segment of the Council more effective, the Council should consider the reports of ACC and the inter-agency task forces and determine how coordination could be carried out. The consideration of the report of ACC in the general segment was too global and needed to be related to specific items. The work done could then be reflected in the conclusions, so that in 1997 at the next coordinating session the Council could have a more focused discussion, leading to concrete activities in the field.

Mr. MARTIN (Observer for the Holy See) said that his delegation joined others in stressing the need to intensify a coordinated programme for poverty eradication, using the key elements which had emerged from recent United Nations international conferences. Poverty eradication was part of the commitment made by nations to implement the ideals of the Charter.

Market forces of the private sector were now clear and determinant actors. The international economic enabling environment for social development, and hence for the eradication of poverty, must take that new situation into account. The logic of competitiveness, central to the globalized market process, must be

related to the logic of solidarity, central to the process of development cooperation. In a globalized economy, transnational economic actors, large and small, were the natural protagonists. At times, large private transnational actors wielded greater economic influence than individual national Governments. Private-sector resource flows represented a major component in resource flows from developed to developing countries but went to only a very limited number of countries. It had to be asked: how far private-sector investment accorded with the government priorities and to what extent market forces could be expected to take on responsibility for responding to social needs; who had responsibility in a globalized market economy for guaranteeing rule-based behaviour in the context of an ethical and juridical framework; and who bore responsibility for outlawing certain speculative activities which were contrary to the shared common interests of the international community, including certain development priorities.

In order to ensure that global economic policy served the interests of social development and poverty eradication, the Task Force on the enabling environment needed to consider: what measures should be taken to facilitate increased private investment to the poorest countries; what measures could be proposed to ensure that economic growth and competitiveness took place in a context which respected the natural environment, labour standards and the availability of resources and ownership titles for women; what measures could be taken to increase socially productive investment by transnational actors in the countries in which they worked; and what measures could be taken to prompt the private sector to assume appropriate responsibility, alongside Governments and civil society, in the progressive realization of social and economic rights.

There was no turning back the tide of economic globalization, which could be beneficial to all nations in the long run. However, there would be short-term losers, whose needs must be addressed by international cooperation. The role of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was important in that regard, as was the provision of official development assistance. There was a pronounced need for the developed countries to create a new political will in favour of solidarity.

Mr. STOBY (Director, Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs) said that there had been some suggestion that there was inadequate treatment of the question of resources in the report of the

Secretary-General (E/1996/61). However, the issue was referred to briefly in paragraph 5 and dealt with fully in paragraphs 57 to 65. Paragraph 58 referred to the general trend of declining resource commitments to multilateral development institutions, and paragraph 60 to the need for the mobilization of substantial new and additional resources. Recommendation 2, in paragraph 67, also addressed the question of resources.

On the issue of the coordinating role of ACC, he felt that it was unfair to suggest that ACC and its task forces were concentrating excessively on operational issues. ACC reviewed the results of conferences in order to decide what needed to be done in terms of conceptual work at the global policy level and what needed to be done in terms of operational activities at the field level. In other words, ACC was intent on maintaining a balance between conceptual work at the global level and ensuring that the results of conferences were operationalized through various mechanisms, particularly the task forces, at the field level.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.